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NEW YORK TIMES
25 September 1985

U.S. Says Nations Are Not Destroying Drug Crops

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 24 — A new State Department report on worldwide drug production says that most major drug-producing nations continue promising to eradicate their marijuana, coca or opium-poppies crops while actually doing little or nothing toward that end.

There are exceptions — notably Colombia, Ecuador and Jamaica — where, the report says, the Governments have eradicated significant marijuana or coca crops, used to make cocaine, in recent months.

But the report, a midyear update of the State Department's annual assessment of narcotics production, says coca crops continued to expand worldwide this year after increasing by one-third last year.

It says marijuana crops have increased slightly while opium-poppies crops, used to make heroin, dropped slightly, due largely to poor weather in Afghanistan last year.

Police Said to Aid Smugglers

"The narcotics production issue is bad, particularly with coca," said Jon R. Thomas, assistant secretary of state for international narcotics matters.

In a related development, Federal drug enforcement officials today said they were investigating allegations that officers of the Mexican Federal Police, armed with pistols and machine guns, have begun escorting marijuana, cocaine and heroin traffickers across the border into Texas.

That charge first came in a letter to President Reagan and 13 members of Congress this month from an organization of current and retired officers of the United States Customs Service and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Neil Lageman, director of the Customs Service's Office of Patrol, said the group, the Fraternal Order of Border Agents, "is a very credible organization" of 50 to 100 "top, highly respected people who are quite knowledgeable about activities on the Mexican border."

'Armed Escort' Provided

The group's letter cited one case in August in which, it said, Mexican authorities "armed with machine guns

and wearing .45-caliber pistols" accompanied drug traffickers across the border into Starr County, Tex., between McAllen and Laredo. According to the letter they "provided an armed escort" and then "set up a perimeter defense" while the traffickers successfully unloaded a load of marijuana and cocaine.

The load was so large, the letter said, that 18 people were needed to carry it "from trucks into boats on the Mexican side, across the Rio Grande" and then "to a house on the United States side."

Mr. Lageman said the Customs Service has begun an investigation of the charges. A spokesman for the Drug Enforcement Administration said the agency "is aware of those incidents" but would not elaborate.

The letter said the border area is patrolled by few customs or drug drug agents. Representative Glenn English, an Oklahoma Democrat who heads the House Information Subcommittee, which has investigated the Customs Service, was one of those who received the letter. He said it "illustrates the tremendous failings in drug interdiction."

Mexican Marijuana Doubled

The group's president, John E. Van Diver, a former senior Drug Enforcement Administration official, could not be reached for comment today.

The State Department report, which does not mention the border incidents, notes that Mexico's marijuana crop, nearly all of which is sent to the United States, more than doubled last year. The Mexican opium crop increased by almost 25 percent, the report adds, and that nation also became "a major transit route for cocaine" smuggled from South America to the United States.

The report adds that with "high narcotics production levels" and "widespread official corruption," Mexico "will remain a major concern in the foreseeable future."

The report also criticizes Bolivia and Belize for failing to eradicate any of their large drug-plant crops — coca in Bolivia and marijuana in Belize.

Earlier this month, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee demanded to know by Sept. 25 whether Belize, formerly British Honduras, planned to eradicate its large marijuana crop,

which is almost ready for harvest. If Belize does not spray its crop to destroy it, the committee wants the State Department to say whether it will recommend that Belize lose United States foreign aid, which will total about \$25 million this fiscal year.

Drugs Foreign Policy Matter

The report estimates that Belize has more than five square miles under marijuana cultivation, an area about one-quarter the size of Manhattan. A State Department official said Belize had not yet made any eradication plans known.

On the positive side, the report notes that in the United States and abroad, narcotics problems have become a higher-priority foreign policy matter in the last year.

"There has been a significantly stepped-up awareness in the world of this problem in 1985," Mr. Thomas said.

The report points out that President Reagan discussed narcotics control problems with other heads of state at the seven-nation economic summit in Bonn last May.

The report also notes that although Burma, the world's largest producer of opium poppies, has not eradicated much of its huge crop, it has for the first time promised to do so.

Peru, the largest producer of coca, has continued trying to eradicate the crop but with only limited success because of terrorist attacks against American-financed narcotics workers, according to the report.

And Panama discovered for the first time this year that it has nearly 2,000 acres under marijuana cultivation and began eradicating it last week.

"Given how difficult it has been to get any kind of progress in narcotics control," a State Department official said, "even these incremental changes are important."